

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

## **Economic Base**

The economic base of Houston County can best be illustrated by evaluating the various sectors or industries that constitute the community's economy in terms of their relative importance and impact, including the community's place in the larger economies of the state and the nation.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor's 2004 Industry Mix, the service industry is the largest employment sector within Houston County, as almost half (47.3%) of the county's jobs are service-oriented in nature. Out of the service sector, retail trade and food services are the largest employers at 11.4% and 10.1% respectively. The second largest sector is government employment; comprising 41.4% of jobs, with the vast majority (26.1%) concentrated in federal government employment. Manufacturing industries make up the third largest employment sector at 8.3%. These three sectors combined account for 97% of all employment within Houston County. Table E.1, located at the end of this section, depicts Houston County's employment data for all industries.

Projections from Woods & Poole Economics indicate that these same three economic sectors will continue to provide the bulk of employment in Houston County over the next two decades. For the 25-year projected period from 2005 to 2030, 92.26% of employment on average is expected to continue to be tied up in the same three sectors. The three largest employment sectors of services, government, and manufacturing are expected to employ averages of 59.03%, 28.26%, and 4.97% respectively, for the period projected from 2005 to 2030. Government employment is expected to decrease as a percentage of overall employment for the projected period. Still, that sector is projected to employ a significant portion of the Houston County labor force. During this same projected period, the services sector is expected to employ an average of 59.03% of the labor force, a substantial increase from the current average of 47.3%.

The county's high percentage of federal government employment can be attributed primarily to the presence of Robins Air Force Base (RAFB). RAFB is the single largest industrial complex in the State of Georgia and by far the largest single employer in Houston County. The Base is situated on 8,435 acres; contains more than 14 million square feet of facilities; and employs more than 26,000 civil service workers, military personnel, and Department of Defense contractors. According to the RAFB FY04 Economic Impact Statement, the Base has an estimated net impact on Georgia's economy of over \$2.8 billion. Robins employed 19,772 federal employees (military and civil service civilians), and 2,504 contractors in fiscal 2004. Employees commute from as far away as the Atlanta area; however, 70% live in Houston County. The county's 13,946 Base employees also account for nearly 69% of the total salaries earned by all Base employees.

It is within the government sector that the largest disparity exists between Houston County's economic base and that of the state and the nation. While government sector employment is at 16.6% at the state level and 14% at the national level, it comprises over 41% in Houston County. In contrast, manufacturing industries represent 11.7% of all employment at the state level, 11% at the national level and a comparable 8.3% in Houston County. Similarly, the services producing industries encompass 65.4% of all employment at the state level, 53% nationally, and 47.3% in Houston County. It should be noted that retail trade is the predominant industry under the services producing sector at the local, state, and national level. Retail trade represents 11.6% of employment at the state level, 16% at the national level, and 11.4% in Houston County.

## LABOR FORCE

Houston County's labor force is described through a brief evaluation of the following labor force characteristics: employment status, occupations, personal income, wages, and commuting patterns.

## *Employment Status*

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, in 2004 Houston County had a total labor force of 59,586, and the county is credited with sustaining a total of 57,321 jobs within all industry sectors. Houston County averaged a 3.8% annual unemployment rate in 2004. On average over the past two years, unemployment within the county has been consistently below the state and national averages (4.6% and 5.5% respectively). This has proven to be a mixed blessing in that a low unemployment rate may equate to a low labor availability base which can sometimes hamper economic growth opportunities.

## *Occupations*

Employment by occupation indicates the level of occupational diversity in a community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2003 County Business Patterns and the Georgia Department of Labor's 2004 Employment and Wage Averages, the largest occupations in Houston County were federal government employment (12,665 employees), local government employment (6,683 employees), retail trade (5,524 employees), accommodation and food services (4,758 employees), manufacturing (4,241 employees), health care and social services (3,280 employees), professional, scientific/technical services (3,280 employees), administrative and waste services (1,976 employees), construction (1,329 employees), finance and insurance (1,043 employees), and state government employment (925 employees). Refer to Table E.1 in the appendix for a complete breakdown of the number of employees by occupation/industry in Houston County.

## *Personal Income*

Personal income is an indicator of the source(s) of income derived by individuals within a defined community. Woods & Poole Economics data shows that in Houston County in 2005, the largest source of personal income was from wages and salaries (60.8%). However; Woods & Poole Economics projects that wages and salaries, as a source of

personal income, is expected to decrease to an average of 57.5% for the period projected from 2005 through 2030. Average personal income from transfer payments (retirement, insurance benefits, medical benefits, unemployment benefits, and veteran's benefits), proprietor's income, and dividends, interest, and rent in Houston County are all projected to increase during the same period to an average of 35.5%.

According to the 2005 Georgia County Guide, in 2002, 61.2% of Houston County's personal income came from the government employment sector, by far the highest of all employment sectors. Interestingly, personal income from service producing industries, the county's largest employment sector, only accounted for 23.2% of Houston County's 2002 personal income totals. Additionally, Houston County's 2003 per capita personal income was \$26,379. This figure represents a significant (over 20%) increase from 1997, and a change in state ranking from the 60<sup>th</sup> highest county to 23<sup>rd</sup> highest.

## *Wages*

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the average weekly wage for all industries in Houston County in 2004 was \$664. The highest average weekly wages were in transportation equipment, fabricated metal production, public utilities, federal employment, scientific/technical services, and nonmetallic mineral product manufacturing. The average weekly wages for these specific industries were \$1,204, \$1,144, \$1,078, \$1,013, \$970, and \$917 respectively. These six industries combined had an average weekly wage in 2004 of \$1,054—this amounted to an average weekly wage that was 63% higher than the average weekly wage for all industries in Houston County. Those industries with the smallest average weekly wages in Houston County in 2004 are as follows: \$200 in accommodation and food services, \$248 in arts, entertainment and recreation, \$334 in agriculture, forestry and fishing, and \$407 in retail trade. Table E.1 reflects average weekly wages for all industries in Houston County.

While retail trade and accommodation and food services comprise the highest percent of employment within the service producing sector in Houston County (11.4% and 10.1%

respectively), they are characterized by having some of the lowest average weekly wages in the county. Federal government employment, representing a significant 26.1% of total employment in the county, is fourth in average weekly wages to the transportation equipment industry, fabricated metal production, and public utilities.

The average weekly wage for all industries in Georgia in 2004 was \$728. In the State of Georgia the highest average weekly wages came from management of companies/enterprises, public utilities, beverage and tobacco manufacturing, information, computer and electronic product manufacturing, and finance and insurance. The average weekly wage for each of these industries in 2004 was \$1,391, \$1,315, \$1,259, \$1,181, \$1,179, and \$1,174, respectively. In 2004, the average weekly wage in Houston County for all industries was approximately 91% of the corresponding state average.

### *Commuting Patterns*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 53,089 employed Houston County residents in 2000; 62.8% working in Houston County and 37.2% employed outside the county. However; in 2000, Houston County saw 16,810 workers commute from other counties for employment purposes within Houston County. This equates to 50,148 total workers in Houston County, with 33.5% coming from other counties. Houston County's ratio of workers IN to workers OUT in 2000 was 0.85. The mean travel time for Houston County workers in 2000 was 20.2 minutes.

## **ECONOMIC RESOURCES**

Houston County has a significant number of business support and economic development programs available. The type of support ranges from counseling and training services to providing financial assistance through grants and loans. Additionally, support programs are available for both start-up businesses as well as existing businesses seeking to expand operations. The wide variety of available support programs is a positive attribute that

community leaders and economic development professionals can and should use to their advantage when seeking to recruit new industries to the county.

The local, regional, and state economic development resources available to both businesses and residents in Houston County are many and varied. These resources are categorized as follows: economic development agencies, economic development programs or tools, and education and training opportunities.

### *Economic Development Agencies*

Houston County is in the service region of the **Middle Georgia Regional Development Center** (MGRDC). The Middle Georgia RDC is a regional planning and development agency serving the communities of Middle Georgia since 1965. The MGRDC provides technical assistance to the 11 counties and 22 cities that encompass its service region. The Middle Georgia RDC is comprised of professional departments specializing in planning, economic development, public administration, information technology, and aging services.

The **Georgia Department of Economic Development** (GDEcD), is the lead agency in state government charged with promoting economic development in Georgia. The department cooperates and partners with other statewide economic and community development agencies, local governments, colleges, universities, and corporate entities to accomplish its mission.

Houston County is also serviced by an Economic Development Program representative from the **Georgia Department of Community Affairs** (DCA). This representative serves three service regions across the state with the purpose of overseeing economic development related projects throughout his/her service area. Additionally, DCA has a regional representative who acts as a liaison between the community and DCA staff in Atlanta. This person is tasked to ensure that communities across Middle Georgia are informed of all available economic development resources.

In addition to these regional and state agencies, there are several recognized economic development agencies specific to Houston County. These include the **Houston County Development Authority**, the **Middle Georgia Regional Development Authority** (Houston, Peach and Pulaski Counties), the **Downtown Development Authority for the City of Warner Robins**, the **Downtown Development Authority for the City of Perry**, and the **Downtown Development Authority for the City of Centerville**.

### *Economic Development Programs or Tools*

There are several economic development programs or tools made available to businesses and residents of Houston County. These include Freeport exemptions and the availability of business development funds.

In an expression of cooperation, the Freeport exemption was entered into between Houston Baldwin, Bibb, Crawford, Jones, Monroe, Peach, Pulaski, Putnam, and Twiggs Counties, as well as the Cities of Eatonton, Forsyth, Macon, and Milledgeville. These governments have all elected to create Freeport exemptions on ad valorem taxes on inventories within their communities. These exemptions include the following types of commercial and industrial inventory:

- Class 1 - Raw materials and goods in process of manufacture - 100% exemption;
- Class 2 - Finished goods produced in Georgia within the last 12 months - 100% exemption; and
- Class 3 - Finished goods stored in Georgia within the last 12 months and destined for shipment out-of-state - 100% exemption.

Additionally, business development funds are available to local governments through the **Georgia Small Business Lender (GSBL)**. In 1978, the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration designated the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center as an economic development district (EDD). The charge of an EDD is to increase per capita income, lower unemployment, and promote economic stability.

As part of this overall economic development effort, in 1982 the MGRDC created the Development Corporation of Middle Georgia (DCMG) to provide access to capital for small businesses, increase the tax base, and create jobs. In 2004, the DCMG changed its name to Georgia Small Business Lender (GSBL) in order to reflect its ability to make loans throughout the State of Georgia.

The GSBL, along with participating private sector lenders, help new and expanding businesses with the acquisition of fixed assets. The five loan programs operated by the GSBL offer smaller down payment requirements, lower interest rates, flexible loan structuring, and longer terms than are generally available through commercial lenders. The benefit to communities is through the creation of jobs, an increased tax base and improved access to goods and services.

In 1983, the GSBL became a Certified Development Company of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). This certification allows the GSBL to make loans through the SBA's 504 Program. Along with offering SBA loans, the GSBL currently operates three additional loan programs. The GSBL operates a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and manages an Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund for the MGRDC. In addition, GSBL operates a pilot micro-loan program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Utilizing the GSBL as the administrative agent has numerous advantages including rapid start-up, economies of scale, experience in lending and asset liquidation, established financial controls, marketing capacity, and access to resources in a wide variety of disciplines.

**Business Outreach Services** (BOS) is located in Macon and operated by the University of Georgia (UGA) with a grant from the Small Business Administration. The UGA BOS program helps businesses improve their competitive advantage by providing sound advice and technical information relating to all phases of small business management. Services that are provided free of charge include business plan development, market research, record keeping and accounting, cash flow analysis, financing alternatives, and international trade. **The Small Business Development Center** (SBDC), under the

umbrella of BOS, offers affordable training seminars and workshops to improve business skills and knowledge of topics including: marketing strategies, accounting principles, tax procedures, computer technology, business law, time management, and procedures on how to start and manage a business. The Macon BOS office offered their services to 345 businesses within the Middle Georgia Region in 2002 with many of these being minority or women-owned businesses.

The **Georgia Tech Regional Economic Development Institute** in Macon offers an array of services to businesses seeking to locate or expand within Middle Georgia. The common objective of these offerings is to grow Georgia's economy by providing technology-driven solutions to the state's businesses and communities. Georgia Tech EDI seeks to attract new companies to Georgia, assist existing enterprises expand, provide technical expertise for enhanced competitiveness, and help communities plan for growth.

The **Industrial Extension Service Regional Office** is located in Warner Robins and operated by **Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI)**. This service provides companies with on-site, confidential management and technical assistance. They have a professional staff of engineers trained in a variety of fields. Some of the services available include plant layout and material handling advice, computer application assistance, technical problem solving, productivity audits, energy audits, environmental health/safety assessments, on-site training, continuing education offerings, satellite downlink access, and business and technical database searches. This assistance is supported by the University System of Georgia, and most often the staff can provide three to five days of help at no charge.

### *Education and Training Opportunities*

There are several educational and training opportunities available in Houston County. These include public schooling at the primary and secondary levels, as well as three full-service satellite campuses representing **Macon State College, Fort Valley State University, Georgia College and State University, and Georgia Military College.**

High-quality technical and adult education programs are also readily available in Houston County through **Middle Georgia Technical College** (MGTC) located in the City of Warner Robins. MGTC offers a wide variety of job training programs, professional certifications, and technical degree programs. Houston County is also served by Georgia's **Quick Start Program**. This program is nationally recognized for providing customized, high-quality training services at no cost to new or expanding businesses.

The Quick Start Program's flexibility allows for each business and/or industry to work on a schedule that is most conducive to the needs of the company. Training sessions are sometimes provided at company facilities, while at other times they are provided at participating technical schools, or other agreed upon locations. Additionally, the schedules are flexible in that courses are offered during the day, at night, or on weekends to meet the needs of the company. According to the Quick Start website, programs are available in fields such as metals, electronics, paper, plastics, textiles, apparel, food processing, printing, chemicals, warehousing and distribution, and business services.

There are several job training programs available to Houston County employees and employers. The Middle Georgia Workforce Investment System (MGWIS) offers job training with contracted educational facilities throughout the region (and outside the region) through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The training is available to all residents of the Middle Georgia Region.

The Middle Georgia Consortium, Inc. (Consortium) is the fiscal agent for MGWIS and receives Federal funding to support workforce development in Middle Georgia under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The Consortium manages WIA funds in association with the Georgia Department of Labor. The Consortium is a locally run non-profit organization designed to increase the educational and occupational skills of Middle Georgians through a variety of career development services. Including its Welfare to Work Program, the Consortium served 1,260 people in 2003. The Consortium contracts with the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Allied Trucking in McDonough, Macon State College, Putnam Hospital's School of Practical Nursing, and Middle Georgia Technical College, among others, to provide training to qualified persons.

Houston County had 34 public schools at the primary and secondary levels in 2003 according to the 2004 Georgia County Guide. For the 2002-2003 school year, K-12 enrollment in all Houston County public schools totaled 22,699 students. This number does not include an additional 1,126 students who attended one of six private schools in Houston County during the 2002-2003 school year. The local school systems in Houston County enjoy an outstanding reputation and serve as a determining factor for many families engaged in making relocation decisions.

## ECONOMIC TRENDS

Woods & Poole Economics projects modest declines in government employment for Houston County from 2000 through 2030 (from 38.82% to 28.26%). Manufacturing jobs are also projected to decline from 6.19% in 2000 to 4.97% in 2030. During this same period of time the percentage of jobs in services is projected to grow from 22.82% to 34.58%. Woods & Poole Economics provides no detailed reasons for these projections, but because of the low wages associated with many of the service producing industries; this is a potentially alarming trend for community leaders and economic development practitioners. The corresponding projected decline in relatively high-paying government sector jobs is equally alarming.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, Houston County's largest employers in 2004 were Robins Air Force Base, Frito Lay, Inc., Houston County Hospital Authority, Perdue Farms, Inc., Southeast Administrative Services, and Wal-Mart Associates, Inc. Houston County's largest employer by far is Robins Air Force Base. The Base employs over 20,000 people and attracts workers from the entire region and beyond.

### *Robins Air Force Base and Associated Economic Opportunities*

The impact of Robins Air Force Base as the preeminent economic driver in Houston County and the entire Middle Georgia region cannot be overstated. The Base has successfully faced the possibility of closure four times over the past fifteen years through

the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) process instituted by Congress. RAFB employees are among the highest-paid, best educated, and most skilled individuals in the Middle Georgia labor force. There are few comparable jobs in the region to provide alternative employment to these individuals. If the base was to close or its operations severely altered, this would undoubtedly lead to an enormous out-migration of a large number of the region's skilled labor force. Other potential effects might include the flooding of the housing market by laid-off employees leaving the area to find other jobs.

Although continually vulnerable to the BRAC process, the Base also provides a great opportunity for economic growth in the region. Currently, Robins Air Force Base accounts for 1.5% of the entire salaries paid within the state of Georgia, and over 50% of the salaries paid within Houston County. With the recent release of the 2005 BRAC recommendations, and the news that Robins Air Force Base was slated to grow as a result of realignment, the Base can now serve as a catalyst for future economic growth and development.

By attracting more military-related missions to RAFB, the region would benefit from an increase in skilled, high-paying civilian jobs. The new missions would also bring additional military personnel, who in turn would spend more money in the region. This creation of new jobs at the Base would have a ripple effect on the local economy leading to additional job creation.

Robins Air Force Base provides an even greater economic opportunity to the region than increased missions. The Base can be used as a stimulus for the development of an aerospace support cluster group. This cluster group would have firms that specialize in aircraft component manufacturing, modifications, maintenance, repair, and overhaul. One program designed to take advantage of these circumstances is recent formation of Governor Purdue's Aerospace Center of Innovation based in Warner Robins. Resources currently located within Georgia help in the development of an aerospace support cluster group in the Middle Georgia region include Warner Robins Air Logistics Center, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Gulfstream, Vought Aircraft Industries, Timco, Ayres

Corporation, Beechcraft, Delta Airlines, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Mercer University.

Local markets are also available in the area. Major components of several large aerospace firms are located in Georgia. Warner Robins Air Logistics Center (WR-ALC), Lockheed Martin, and Gulfstream have major components located in Georgia and each contracts out over one billion dollars of work each year. Robins spent approximately \$3.68 billion in contracts during Fiscal Year 2003, of which \$247.6 million or 6.7% went to Georgia firms. Lockheed Martin contracts totaled approximately \$483.8 million in Fiscal Year 2003. Raytheon received contracts totaling \$433.3 million during Fiscal Year 2003, while General Dynamics contracts totaled \$357.1 during the same time period.

These corporations and Robins Air Force Base need firms providing a number of specialized services. Services identified include reengineering and reverse engineering of electronic components and mechanical parts, precious metal plating, manufacture of gaskets, o-rings, etc., aircraft antenna testing, circuit card assemblies, low quantity manufacturing of small metal parts, and production of precision die-forged aluminum alloy aircraft components.

The cluster approach to economic development is the one of the most cost-effective methods to create high-paying jobs. This method of development strengthens the local industrial base, cluster firms gain competitive advantage and grow, create a skilled labor pool for cluster firms, and the cluster becomes self-perpetuating as other firms in the industry continue to locate in the region. An aerospace cluster centered on Robins Air Force Base and the Middle Georgia region will create high-paying jobs, strengthen the Bases' chances of surviving future BRAC initiatives, reduce the economic uncertainty related to Base closure, and stimulate economic growth.

### *Economic Diversification*

Although significant emphasis within Houston County is focused around Robins Air Force Base and its sustainability, Houston County is also seeking to diversify its

economy. It can be argued that Houston County's most pressing economic development need is diversification of the local economy. Houston County and the entire Middle Georgia region must plan for the worst-case scenario and seek to lessen the region's dependence on the Base. The region can take advantage of the highly skilled workforce on the Base by attracting similar private sector aerospace companies. However, efforts should still be made to attract un-related industries to the area to continue a much-needed diversification of the economy.

In September 2004, the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) awarded a grant to the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center (MGRDC) to assist with developing a regional economic diversification plan designed to lessen the region's overall economic dependency on Defense expenditures. The need for such a plan was necessitated by the net impact Robins Air Force Base has on the region's economy and the impending 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) recommendations. The Base had an annual net payroll of \$1.218 billion, annual expenditures of \$246 million, and a retiree payroll of \$472 million in fiscal 2004. In addition, the value of indirect jobs created because of the Base was estimated to be over \$870 million.

In developing the regional economic diversification plan, industry growth and decline patterns for Houston County, as well as other regional counties were studied and analyzed at length. It was determined that a greater demand for services is typically generated by a strong, high-paying government sector. Higher paying government jobs help to "pump" money into the county's economy thereby positively affecting other industry sectors (i.e., demand for services and retail sales). Analysis performed as a result of the diversification plan confirmed that continued service industry growth is anticipated for Houston County. Specifically, the health care industry is projected to burgeon in Houston County, consistent with the national growth trend for this industry.

The final result of the diversification planning process was creation of the *Middle Georgia Economic Diversification Strategy and Action Plan*. The plan contains five industry-specific activities or avenues for possible economic diversification. The top viable opportunity sectors included:

- Healthcare;
- Tourism;
- Trucking, Warehousing, and Distribution;
- Retirement Industry Development; and
- Recruitment of State Agencies

Each industry identified in the plan contained recommended implementation actions, responsible agencies, coordinating agencies, potential sources for funding assistance, and a timeline with measurable milestones and targets. Houston County stakeholders have initiated action regarding some of these economic growth and diversification opportunities, as well as pursuing other development opportunities. In order to be successful and yield dividends, local government elected officials and business leaders must take the initiative to continue making the implementation of this diversification strategy a high priority. Without this commitment it is unlikely that any determinate outcome will result.

### *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*

The *2004 Middle Georgia Joint Regional Plan and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* further defines Houston County's economic development ambitions. Many of these items are mutually supportive of the goals and objectives identified by the diversification strategy. Houston County's high priority economic development projects are as follows:

#### ***Trucking, Warehousing, & Distribution***

Bibb and Houston Counties are the primary locations where trucking, warehousing, and distribution activities occur within the Middle Georgia region. Due to the proximity to the Interstate system and the presence of a large labor pool, these counties are attractive for such operations. Just recently, Kohl's department store opened a distribution center in Bibb County, near the Houston County line. This single facility created over 300 new jobs for the area. These two counties are also in contention to receive additional warehouse and distribution facilities within their jurisdictions. Distribution and

warehousing is an important component of the region's economy due to the presence of the interstate system passing through, the proximity to metro Atlanta, and the proximity to ports along Georgia's coast.

Other recent industry success stories include the expansion of the Graphics Packaging and Perdue Farms distribution facilities in the City of Perry. A 2005 OneGeorgia EDGE award of \$3 million to the Houston County Development Authority for Perdue Farms facility expansion resulted in the retention of 1,200 jobs and creation of an additional 700 jobs in Houston County. More recently, Governor Purdue announced an additional 1,000 jobs coupled with a \$155 million investment related to cooking and distribution operations. Also, as part of a follow-on initiative to the *Middle Georgia Economic Diversification Strategy and Action Plan*, a benchmarking and feasibility study was conducted by the Middle Georgia RDC to help determine the area's competitiveness in relation to the trucking, warehousing and distribution industry. The result of this study validated that Houston County is indeed an especially attractive location for trucking, warehousing, and distribution operations.

### ***Retirement Industry Development***

The City of Perry is anticipating growth in the commercial and service sectors as a 2,000 unit retirement community was recently completed. This development will cause retail and service sectors, in particular, to provide for the needs of the new residents that will retire to Houston County.

### ***Commercial and Industrial Development – Development of I-75 Corridor in Houston and Peach Counties***

Geographical locations that can anticipate increased commercial and industrial activity are spread throughout Houston County. Specifically, all directions from State Route 96 in Houston County can expect to experience growth as a new interchange has been completed along Interstate 75. Additionally, the recent completion of the Russell Parkway extension will result in increased commercial activity along these corridors.

This commercial growth will follow much of the increased residential development of the central portion of Houston County.

Within Houston and Peach Counties, the I-75 corridor between the cities of Byron and Perry is primed for industrial development. Middle Georgia's geographic location provides easy access to all of the southeastern United States, as well as Georgia's ports. Currently, Houston and Peach Counties have a relatively undeveloped Interstate corridor.

The development of this corridor will allow for the creation of quality, well-paying jobs for Middle Georgia residents as they seek to build personal wealth and improve their quality of life. Additionally, future development will add to the local tax base, reducing the burden on personal property owners in each county.

In order to successfully achieve the development of this corridor, Houston and Peach counties must expand the necessary infrastructure to allow for such development. First, road access must be obtained in order to allow for traffic flow to and from the locations where development is desirable. Additionally, water, sewer, natural gas, and communications infrastructure must be available in these locations. Certain portions of the areas in question are currently equipped with adequate infrastructure, but not all areas within the development corridor. The community may also find it necessary to secure certain properties throughout this area to ensure that industrial property is available for development.

Another project that provides an anticipated increase in future industrial siting capacity involves land approximate to Robin Air Force Base (RAFB) in the eastern section of the County. This project involves a negotiated land swap between the City of Warner Robins and the State of Georgia. Under the agreement, development rights to two parcels of land, estimated at 30 acres (with a possible additional 60 acres that would require extensive site preparation), adjacent to RAFB will be exchanged between the two parties. This will serve the dual purpose of providing long term protection to portions of a fragile wetland ecosystem while making available an important industrial development site with direct access to RAFB runway facilities. The development of this site is in keeping with local

and state long range economic goals of expanding RAFB mission capability, avoiding encroachment, and precluding incompatible development in the vicinity of the Base. Required improvements will include site preparation activities including the probable construction of a road and the installation of utilities.

Expanding the region's existing infrastructure system in order to accommodate future economic growth within its service area addresses the general goal of stimulating economic development in the more rural areas of the district. In addition, enhancing service delivery also assists existing business and industry as well as the general populace. Interested stakeholders include Houston County, Peach County, the Cities of Byron, Fort Valley, Centerville, Warner Robins and Perry, the Houston County Development Authority, the Peach County Development Authority, Georgia Department of Economic Development, and the Middle Georgia RDC. Economic programs that could provide potential sources of funding include EDA, USDA, Georgia DCA, OneGeorgia, SPLOST, and GEFA.

### ***Aerospace Industry Development***

Robins Air Force Base is the largest industrial complex in the State of Georgia. Additionally, it is the largest single employer in Middle Georgia. Recognizing the importance of this industry and striving to enhance upon the Aerospace resources, the state formed the Middle Georgia Innovation Center for Aircraft Logistics (MICAL) in 2004. MICAL is a membership organization commissioned by Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue that emphasizes innovation by: increasing the overall level and the flow of aerospace technology and research from institutions of higher education into the public sector, especially the WR-ALC, the private sector and the marketplace, and increases technology jobs in the region as a result.

Furthermore, the host community to Robins Air Force Base, the City of Warner Robins in partnership with the Houston County Development Authority and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Partnership identified and are in the closing phase of a 544-acre land swap with the State

of Georgia. The identified site is located at the northeast end of the Base's runway which has the potential of becoming an Aerospace Maintenance Center.

The vision for this site is to become the nation's center of excellence for military and commercial aerospace while supporting military missions, economic development, and education in Middle Georgia. This partnership would expand use of facilities and staff, create a high-tech environment to meet current and future needs, and position the Base and the region for future growth in the aerospace industry. The primary goal addressed through this project is to develop significant economic opportunities and create high-tech, high paying jobs which will affect a large part of the region. Interested partners include specifically Houston County and the cities of Warner Robins, Centerville, and Perry, RAFB, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Partnership, the Middle Georgia Regional Development Authority, the Central Georgia Joint Development Authority and approximately 23 other affected counties.

### ***Development and Implementation of Regional Heritage Tourism Program***

Heritage preservation and tourism have long been major contributors to economic development in Middle Georgia. Statewide, tourism is Georgia's second most important industry, generating \$23.9 billion and over 200,000 jobs in FY 2002. The Middle Georgia region, an integral portion of the resource rich Historic South Georgia area, continues to benefit from its priceless legacy of cultural and historic resources.

The communities of Houston County are home to a rich variety of tourist destination attractants. Among these are the Robins Air Force Base and the Museum of Aviation in Warner Robins, the Georgia National Fairgrounds & Agricenter in Perry, and the Mossy Creek Festival, held twice each year in the southern portion of Houston County. Each of these facilities and the programs they support receive national and state wide attention.

In addition, the region as a whole boasts an enormous treasure of historic, heritage, and eco-related resources. Each of the localities within the Middle Georgia region actively engage in a variety of tourist and historic preservation projects geared to spur economic development within their community and, to some extent, the region.

Through increased cooperative planning and marketing, Houston County constituents and the other communities that make up the entire Middle Georgia area can better take advantage of the opportunities the tourist industry presents to the region in terms of branding, visitor draw, and promotion. Recently, these communities have increased their efforts to work closer and more intentionally to develop and link programs so as to better leverage asset promotional opportunities. One example of these efforts is the development of a web based regional heritage directory. With the increasing dominance of the Internet as a trip planning tool by tourists, a comprehensive Middle Georgia heritage tourism website will undoubtedly serve as an invaluable tool for both promoting tourism and educating citizens.

A next necessary step is to provide a connection that will link this tool directly to the region's localities and service travelers. This will be accomplished by the development of strategically located regional 'tourism gateway offices.' These offices, hosted by existing local government visitor centers will serve as information distribution stopping points for our guests, providing background, itineraries, and information for the entire region rather than for simply one community. The City of Forsyth, in the north portion of the region, is pursuing plans to develop a pilot gateway office for the region in their community. Another such office, sited in the Houston County area, would ideally serve potential visitors traveling north on Interstate 75, as well those persons already drawn to the area by the Georgia National Fairgrounds & Agricenter, Robins Air Force Base, and the Museum of Aviation.

### ***Increase Surface Transportation Capacity***

During the last decade, Houston County has experienced the greatest amount of growth in the region. Unfortunately, rapid growth has outpaced the county's surface transportation capacities. This is especially true in the north - south growth corridor between the cities of Warner Robins and Perry in the vicinity of Houston Lake Road and State Highway 41. The proposed State Highway 96 expansion project may have an even larger regional impact. State Route 96 is a corridor used for trucking from I-75 connecting to I-16, which is used to connect the shipping ports of Savannah to other parts of the state and country.

These and other necessary projects have been scheduled in the Warner Robins Area Transportation Study (WRATS) and the Georgia DOT Short-Term Work Program. Additional significant projects within the county include North Houston Lake Road and Moody Road.

Additional projects for which the community has identified a significant need include the Ball Street Extension to the South Perry Parkway. This project has been partially funded by SPLOST to the extent of \$441,000, but must go through environmentally sensitive areas and is extremely costly. This extension is necessary to keep industrial traffic from clogging the downtown arteries of the City of Perry. This route will provide easier interstate access to trucks traveling into and out of certain facilities in the City of Perry.

An expansion of North Houston Road from the City of Centerville has been identified as a need to connect the city to Sardis Church Road in south Bibb County. Sardis Church Road will be a multi-lane corridor from I-75 to State Route 247. Prior to completion of this project, Bibb County and Houston County must determine the viability of constructing this road, as part of the extension of North Houston Road. Furthermore, parallel to North Houston Road is Carl Vinson Parkway.

The City of Warner Robins also desires to develop a corridor paralleling I-75 from State Route 96 to Watson Boulevard. To date, the right-of-way along the northern portion has been acquired by the county. This corridor will serve two purposes as it will allow for commercial and industrial development near the interstate, as well as an artery to relieve traffic congestion. Similarly, Houston County and the Georgia Department of Transportation are jointly seeking to upgrade sections of U.S. 41 to the City of Byron (in Peach County) during fiscal years 2008-2010.

Increasing the surface transportation capacity within Houston County and its cities will address the general goal of expanding regional infrastructure capacity. In addition, enhancing and widening the county's road network assists existing business and industry by creating an environment for efficient business operations and the movement of goods and services. Having an improved direct connection to I-75 will aid in attracting

additional development. Interested stakeholders include Houston County and the Cities of Warner Robins, Centerville, and Perry. Potential funding sources include local funds, the Houston County Development Authority, and funds from Georgia DOT.

### ***Acquire and Develop Publicly-Owned Industrial Sites***

Existing publicly owned industrial sites in Houston County, such as the Foy Evans Industrial Park (a successful EDA project), are beginning to use up their available land. Therefore, the community has efforts underway to secure additional industrial property that will be used solely for industrial projects, and not for mixed uses. The community's desire is to develop industrial corridors within the county to add to the local tax base.

Specifically, two areas in the community were identified as potentially viable areas for additional industrial development. A western corridor around I-75 is desirable, as the western portion of Houston County has access to the Interstate. Additionally, the eastern portion of the county is traversed by State Route 247 – a north-south corridor. By developing these two corridors, Houston County and its cities can further opportunities for adding to the local tax base and create an environment where standards of living can be enhanced by high wages and stable jobs.

Developing additional industrial space in southern Houston County will address the general goal of expanding region infrastructure capacity. The benefits of attracting new industry include the creation of jobs and additional capital investment, and by using land formerly owned by the state and putting it into private use, value is returned to the tax rolls. Project partners and potential sources of funding include Houston County, City of Warner Robins, City of Perry, Houston County Development Authority, One Georgia, and Georgia DCA.

### ***Infrastructure Improvements at and around the Perry/Houston County Airport***

The City of Perry is in need of additional infrastructure in the form of wastewater and natural gas service for the Perry Airport and surrounding property. The area around the airport has significant growth potential. The City is planning an industrial park in the area

to attract industry and commercial interests that will not only serve Perry and Houston County, but also neighboring Peach County.

Also, the community is developing additional facilities at the airport that will be beneficial in attracting new industry to the area. Planned improvements include airport road realignment, site preparation for an additional 28-airplane bay, landscaping, and creation of a greenspace buffer. Further improvements at the airport include replacement of the runway and taxiway lighting systems which are old and failing and create a safety hazard at the airport. Developing additional industrial space in southern Houston County will address the general goal of building region infrastructure capacity and the objective of providing better access to economic development activities through aviation facilities. Any new customers will aid in retiring the debt for improvements through additional usage. The benefits of attracting new industry include the creation of jobs and additional capital investment acting to expand the local tax bases. Project partners and potential sources of funding include Houston County, City of Perry, Airport Authority, Federal Aviation Administration, GDEcD, and DCA.

### ***Develop Warner Robins Conference Center***

The Warner Robins community is pursuing a 1,000-seat conference center. Four organizations in Warner Robins have joined together to fund a feasibility study for a hotel/conference center to serve the meeting needs of business generated by Robins Air Force Base and the local community. The study was funded by the Warner Robins Chamber of Commerce, Flint Energies, Houston County, the Houston County Development Authority, and the City of Warner Robins. Finnell Consulting has completed the feasibility study for a hotel, and the conference center economic impact analysis was recently completed during the summer of 2005.

The core group of interested persons is currently considering ownership options along with the feasibility study. In order for this project to become a reality, funding for construction and ongoing operations must be secured. The hope is to generate new money into the economy through meeting and convention tourism. This project would

accomplish the goal of capturing outside dollars through tourism. Potential project partners and funding sources include the Houston County Development Authority, the Warner Robins Chamber of Commerce, and various private entities.

***Undertake Wastewater System Improvement Projects***

While current capacity is sufficient, the Cities of Warner Robins and Perry are attentive to long term concerns related to wastewater treatment capacity. These needs include additional wastewater treatment plant capacity and pre-treatment facilities. It is foreseeable that there may be an inability to serve portions of the County that are outside gravity flow basins currently served by Perry and Warner Robins. Creating additional infrastructure capacity within Houston County will allow for the recruitment and expansion of industries within the community. Prior to the initiation of a project of this type, engineering studies must be completed to determine the most appropriate means of solving the wastewater issues facing the Cities of Perry and Warner Robins.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan for Houston County and the Cities of Centerville, Perry and Warner Robins

Industry Mix - 2004	Houston County				State of Georgia			
	NUMBER OF FIRMS	AVG MONTHLY EMPLOY	%	AVG WKLY WAGE	NUMBER OF FIRMS	AVG MONTHLY EMPLOY	%	AVG WKLY WAGE
<b>Goods Producing</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>5,666</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>\$639</b>	<b>37,706</b>	<b>680,392</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>\$768</b>
Agriculture, forestry, & fishing	15	90	0.2	\$334	2,294	26,068	0.6	\$432
Mining	*	*	*	*	244	7,053	0.2	\$993
Construction	232	1,329	2.8	\$562	25,217	199,494	5.2	\$739
Manufacturing	67	4,241	8.3	\$669	9,952	447,777	11.7	\$797
Food manufacturing	3	2,477	4.9	\$578	620	64,873	1.5	\$705
Beverage & tobacco mfg	*	*	*	*	111	5,393	0.1	\$1,259
Textile mills	*	*	*	*	287	36,103	1.0	\$678
Textile product mills	*	*	*	*	553	38,733	1.0	\$611
Apparel manufacturing	*	*	*	*	192	8,249	0.2	\$485
Wood product manufacturing	*	*	*	*	657	24,235	0.5	\$627
Paper manufacturing	*	*	*	*	239	24,256	0.5	\$1,033
Printing & related activities	11	116	0.2	\$737	1,229	20,623	0.5	\$811
Petroleum & coal products mfg	*	*	*	*	43	1,149	0.1	\$979
Chemical manufacturing	3	141	0.2	\$669	528	21,096	0.5	\$1,060
Plastics & rubber products mfg	3	212	0.4	\$533	426	24,460	0.5	\$718
Nonmetallic mineral product mfg	7	629	1.3	\$917	696	19,454	0.4	\$776
Primary metal manufacturing	*	*	*	*	90	8,025	0.2	\$820
Fabricated metal product mfg	9	142	0.3	\$1,144	1,229	25,787	0.5	\$687
Machinery manufacturing	*	*	*	*	608	22,661	0.5	\$796
Computer & electronic product mfg	*	*	*	*	274	13,127	0.3	\$1,179
Electrical equipment/appliance	*	*	*	*	152	16,267	0.4	\$1,006
Transportation equipment	3	46	0.2	\$1,204	369	45,012	1.2	\$1,014
Furniture & related product mfg	8	91	0.2	\$491	796	13,800	0.3	\$580
Miscellaneous mfg industries	10	42	0.1	\$385	842	13,946	0.3	\$802
<b>Service Producing</b>	<b>1,809</b>	<b>23,717</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>\$501</b>	<b>193,371</b>	<b>2,508,920</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>\$727</b>
Wholesale trade	71	611	1.2	\$801	22,522	206,454	5.4	\$1,085
Retail trade	393	5,524	11.4	\$407	32,450	445,866	11.6	\$464
Transportation and warehousing	35	318	0.6	\$452	6,227	150,020	4.1	\$870
Utilities	6	164	0.3	\$1,078	455	20,163	0.5	\$1,315
Information	26	535	1.1	\$651	4,284	119,358	3.1	\$1,181
Finance and insurance	133	1,043	2.2	\$612	14,490	155,398	4.1	\$1,174
Real estate, rental and leasing	103	421	0.7	\$453	10,585	59,295	1.5	\$770
Professional, scientific/tech svcs	223	3,280	5.4	\$970	28,664	192,646	5.0	\$1,136
Management: companies/enterprises	13	139	0.2	\$862	1,195	53,429	1.4	\$1,391
Administrative and waste services	115	1,976	4.2	\$433	14,687	263,641	6.8	\$529
Educational services	18	331	0.6	\$714	2,048	48,891	1.3	\$706
Health care and social services	212	3,280	6.4	\$529	17,807	338,187	8.8	\$723
Arts, entertainment and recreation	25	340	0.7	\$248	2,585	36,763	1.0	\$525
Accommodation and food services	222	4,758	10.1	\$200	16,006	322,327	8.4	\$270
Other services (except government)	216	995	2.1	\$472	19,369	96,483	2.5	\$498
<b>Unclassified - industry not assigned</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>\$474</b>	<b>7,008</b>	<b>11,599</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>\$765</b>
<b>Total - Private Sector</b>	<b>2,144</b>	<b>29,414</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>\$527</b>	<b>238,086</b>	<b>3,200,911</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>\$736</b>

*The Joint Comprehensive Plan for Houston County and the Cities of Centerville, Perry and Warner Robins*

<b>Total - Government</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>20,273</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>\$864</b>	<b>8,160</b>	<b>633,545</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>\$691</b>
<b>Federal government</b>	22	12,665	26.1	\$1,013	1,773	93,220	2.5	\$1,071
<b>State government</b>	49	925	2.1	\$538	2,761	148,263	4.1	\$641
<b>Local government</b>	64	6,683	13.3	\$626	3,625	392,062	9.9	\$620
<b>ALL INDUSTRIES - HOUSTON COUNTY</b>	<b>2,279</b>	<b>49,687</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>\$664</b>				
<b>ALL INDUSTRIES - GEORGIA</b>					<b>246,245</b>	<b>3,834,456</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>\$728</b>

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

NOTES: \* Denotes confidential data relating to individual employers and is not available for disclosure.  
 Figures in columns may not sum accurately due to rounding since all figures represent averages.  
 These data use the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) categories  
 (as opposed to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) categories).